



# Waikato Journal of Education

ISSN 2382-0373  
Website: <http://wje.org.nz>



Wilf Malcolm Institute  
of Educational Research  
*Te Pūtahi Rangahau Mātauranga o Wilf Malcolm*  
THE UNIVERSITY OF WAIKATO

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**Title of Issue/section: Volume 23, Issue 2, 2018**

**Guest Editor: Dianne Forbes**

**Editor: Noeline Wright**

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**To cite this article:** Lamb, A. (2018). Book review. [Review of the book “E-learning ecologies: Principles for new learning and assessment,” by Cope, B., & Kalantzis, M. (Eds.)]. *Waikato Journal of Education*, 23(2), 83-84. doi: 10.15663/wje.v23i2.657.

**To link to this volume:** [10.15663/wje.v23i2](https://doi.org/10.15663/wje.v23i2)

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## Book review

Cope, B., & Kalantzis, M. (Eds.). (2017). *E-learning ecologies: Principles for new learning and assessment*. London, United Kingdom: Taylor & Francis.

E-learning ecologies is a metaphor, that, as the editors explain, compares complex and evolving biological ecosystems to that of learning environments. This book, using this metaphor as a foundation, explores the complexities and transformations possible, afforded by new and emerging technologies, to current learning environments along with the necessary paradigm shift required by educators to fully realise them.

Though this book is of great use to any practising educator it has been written primarily for an academic audience. However, the authors do an exemplary job of crafting each chapter in such a way that it doesn't shy away from academic jargon but layers the information to inform and clarify along the narrative journey. Supporting literature is widely used by each author which offers a rich pool of material for any reader who wants to delve deeper into any area covered within the book.

The book is part of the culmination of work coordinated by the editors, Cope and Kalantzis, and members of their 'new learning' research group from the University of Illinois. The results of this group's conceptual, theoretical and analytical discoveries are explored and discussed throughout the text. Other creations also came about from their work, one of which, an e-learning tool called Scholar, is featured in a few chapters. All of this background is outlined clearly and openly early in the first chapter.

Because of this, I strongly recommend that any reader of *E-learning Ecologies* start with Chapter One, authored by the editors themselves, before embarking on the remaining chapters as it offers a solid foundation for the later exploration of themes covered in subsequent chapters.

From a theoretical and literature supported foundation, the editors lay out a logical and methodical introduction to the key theme. A core concept reiterated throughout the book is that pedagogies, not technology, drive learning practices. The editors make it clear that "technologies are pedagogically neutral" (p. 6) and this underpins the entirety of the book.

The first chapter starts by exploring the theoretical underpinnings of two overarching pedagogical practices, didactic and reflexive, and the reader is guided through a narrative that explores the history of these and introduces the changes technologies have, and are, making on educational practices.

Overall, the editors of the book "propose that reflexive pedagogy, enabled by an emerging wave of educational technologies, can create e-learning ecologies that will be more engaging for learners, more effective, more resource efficient, and more equitable in the face of learner diversity" (p. 13). Cope & Kalantzis also contend that many new technologies, used poorly by educators, are in fact not transforming the many didactic practices often in use, but reinforcing them instead.



The introductory part of Chapter One leads to the basis that forms the structure of the rest of the book. The editors offer up seven ‘new learning’ affordances for the reader to explore. These affordances, and each chapter title are: ubiquitous learning, active knowledge production, multimodal knowledge representations, recursive feedback, collaborative intelligence, metacognitive reflection, and differentiated learning.

Each subsequent chapter is authored by other members of the ‘new learning’ research group and upon leaving Chapter One, the reader is left to explore the book in any order they want. Aside from some later chapters referring to earlier ones, each chapter is a self-contained exploration of their chosen theme along with supporting literature.

I was pleased to see that some chapters acknowledged and recognised the issues faced by educators when technologies are not available to all. The ‘digital divide’ most certainly positioned some on the ‘have not’ side of the divide (p. 48) and the authors make it clear that the stakeholders and policymakers have duties to ensure digital access equity. Higher level strategy aside, educators will always need to consider any ‘digital divide’ issues when planning.

The value of each chapter’s content will vary from reader to reader. The individual affordances offered by the authors could be used successfully by any educator in their practice independently of the others. However, I believe the authors of the book see the sum of their discoveries as a whole – an ecology as such – an e-learning ecology, as the desired outcome of their research.

The reader will likely find some affordances and their respective chapters easier to relate to, such as Chapter Two which covers ubiquitous learning – ‘anywhere, anytime learning’. This chapter will resonate strongly with any educator already familiar with current technologies and their potential in learning environments. However, chapters such as Chapter Seven, covering metacognition within the e-learning context, could be quite challenging to absorb and bring into the practical learning environment. Fortunately, the authors do an admirable job in offering suggestions and examples to help the reader frame the concept in familiar situations.

Which brings me to my final remarks about this book. There are no quick fixes within each chapter and you won’t find advice towards specific hardware, devices and software. Where the authors refer to specific technologies, such as the Scholar e-learning tool, it is meant as an example, not as a definitive tool for certain practices. Instead, *E-learning Ecologies* offers the reader opportunities to gather enough information from the explorations given, to personally explore the pedagogical implications and the affordances given by new technologies as presented by the authors.

**Alistair Lamb**

University of Waikato